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### USDA RURAL REVITALIZATION TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS STRENGTHENING THE RURAL INFORMATION CENTER

This spring the Secretary of Agriculture established a Department-wide Rural Revitalization Task Force to examine the rural economic situation and make recommendations about USDA's future role in providing rural economic development. The result was the June 30, 1989, report to the Secretary of Agriculture, *A Hard Look at USDA's Rural Development Programs*, in which the Task Force made eighteen recommendations.

The Task Force identified for review seventy-eight rural nonfarm programs of eight USDA agencies and conducted surveys of the USDA field and Washington office staffs. The surveys identified rural needs and problems, examined the wide range of current USDA rural programs, and identified factors affecting the performance of these programs. The surveys led the Task Force to conclude that, "while USDA's programs seek to provide help to rural communities and rural people, for the most part they do not promote any single strategy for developing rural areas. In some cases also, rural needs have changed faster than programs have adapted to keep pace. As a result, current rural development programs make an uneven contribution to the overall goal of improving the performance of the rural economy." (p. 7)

USDA rural programs must adjust to the changes in rural America. Today only two percent of the U. S. population lives on farms and fewer than

nine percent of the rural labor force farm. Nonfarm industries predominate in most rural areas. Despite these changes the Task Force observed, the Department's attention remains heavily concentrated on the agricultural sector of the rural economy. Although USDA's authorizing legislation gives the Department the lead Federal responsibility for coordinating rural development programs, half of USDA's 1988 budget was spent on farm programs. As a result, agricultural initiatives frequently dominate the attention of USDA management while concerted action on equally worthy rural development objectives receives less attention.



The Task Force, through its eighteen recommendations, intends to sharpen the focus of USDA's rural policy and programs and to strengthen USDA's capacity for effective program implementation. The Task Force recommended that USDA strengthen the resources of the Rural Information Center (RIC) at the National Agricultural Library, encourage its use among USDA staff, and require that RIC summarize and report its information requests to a proposed Department-level rural policy council to assist in identifying emerging rural issues. The recommendations have four themes: (1) clarifying USDA's commitment to rural development, (2) strengthening coordination among USDA's rural programs, (3) enhancing USDA's capacity for strategic action, and (4) improving USDA's ability to implement its rural programs.

## NEW RIC STAFF MEMBER

Carmon Kiah joined the RIC staff in July as a part-time Social Science Technical Information Specialist. Mrs. Kiah received her B.A. from the University of Cincinnati and, M.A. from Atlanta University. This May, she completed her doctoral studies in Agricultural and Extension Education at the University of Maryland. While attending the University she worked with the National 4-H Council on several projects which include a variety of design, implementation, and evaluation activities. Mrs. Kiah has held several administration positions in college student affairs. Most recently she was Assistant Dean of Students at Hollins College in Roanoke, VA.

## RIC BIBLIOGRAPHIES

*Agricultural and Farmer Cooperatives, 1979-1989.*  
346 citations. Prepared by Patricia La Caille John.  
July 1989.

## RIC EXHIBITS

Community Development Society, St. Louis, MO,  
July 23-27.

American Institute of Cooperation Annual  
Conference, Indianapolis, IN, July 24-27.  
Dave Holder, USDA Extension Service,  
coordinated the exhibit.

## FY89 RURAL INFORMATION CENTER ANALYSIS

- User location
- Rural topics
- Affiliation

### States, Territories, Etc. Submitting Highest Number Of Requests

District of Columbia.....	14%
Maryland.....	9%
Texas.....	6%
New Mexico, Virginia, (4% each) .....	8%
Illinois, Montana, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin (3% each).....	15%
Alaska, California, Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, Washington, Wyoming, Foreign Countries (2% each).....	30%
All Others (28 states) .....	18%

### Breakdown Of Rural Revitalization Questions

Economic Viability .....	60%
Quality of Life/Natural Resources .....	24%
Local Government Services .....	11%
Leadership/Community Change.....	5%

### Affiliation Breakdown

State and County Extension Staff.....	41%
USDA Officials.....	14%
Individuals.....	12%
Universities.....	8%
Libraries.....	7%
Community/Rural/Economic Development Organizations & Businesses (4% each).....	8%
Federal Officials (non-USDA) & Public Interest Groups (3% each) .....	6%
State Officials .....	2%
Congress and Foreign Officials (1% each).....	2%